

THE ENCHANTED WOOD

By Enid Blyton



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HOW THEY FOUND THE MAGIC WOOD

There were once three children, called Jo, Bessie, and Fanny. All their lives they had lived in a town, but now their father had a job in the country, so they were all to move as soon as ever they could.

"What fun to be in the country!" said Jo. "I shall learn all about animals and birds!"

"And I shall pick as many flowers as I want to," said Bessie.

"And I shall have a garden of my own," said Fanny.

When the day came for the move all the children were excited. A small van came to their door and two men helped their father and mother to pile everything into it. When it was full the van drove away, and the children put on their coats and hats to go with their father and mother to catch a train at the station.

"Now we're off!" cried Jo.

"The country, the country!" sang Bessie.

"We might see fairies there!" said Fanny.

The train whistled, and chuffed out of the station. The children pressed their noses to the window and watched the dirty houses and the tall chimneys race by. How they hated the town! How lovely it would be to be in the clean country, with flowers growing everywhere, and birds singing in the hedges!

"We might have adventures in the country," said Jo. "There will be streams and hillsides, big fields and dark woods. Oooh, it will be lovely!"

"You won't have any more adventures in the country than you will have in the town," said their father. "I dare say you will find it all very dull."

But that's where he was quite wrong. My goodness, the things that happened to those three children!

They arrived at last at the tiny station where they were to get out. A sleepy-looking porter put their two bags on a barrow, and said he would bring them along later. Off they all went down the winding country lane, chattering loudly.

"I wonder what our cottage will be like?" said Bessie.

"And I wonder if we've got a garden?" said Fanny.

But long before they reached their new home they were tired out and could not bother to say a word more to each other. Their cottage was five miles from the station, and as the children's father could not afford to do anything but walk there, it seemed a very long way indeed. There was no bus to take them, so the tired children dragged their feet along, wishing for a cup of milk and a cosy bed.

At last they got there—and dear me, it was worth all the walk, for the cottage was sweet. Roses hung from the walls—red and white and pink—and honeysuckle was all round the front door. It was lovely!



The van was at the door, and the two men were moving all the furniture into the little house. Father helped, whilst Mother went to light the kitchen fire to make them all a hot drink.

They were so tired that they could do nothing but drink hot milk, eat a few biscuits, and tumble into their roughly-made beds. Jo looked out of the window but he was too sleepy to see properly. In one minute the two girls in their small room were asleep, and Jo too, in his even tinier room.

What fun it was to wake up in the morning and see the sun shining in at strange windows! It didn't take Jo, Bessie, and Fanny very long to dress. Then they were out in the little garden, running through the grass that had grown so

long, and smelling the roses that grew all around.

Mother cooked eggs for them, and they ate their breakfast hungrily.

"It's lovely to be in the country!" said Jo, looking out of the window to the far-away hills.

"We can grow vegetables in the garden," said Bessie.

"There will be glorious walks all round," said Fanny.

That day every one helped to get the little house straight and tidy. Father was going to work the next day. Mother hoped there would be some one to give her washing to do, then she would make enough money to buy a few hens. That would be lovely!

"I shall collect the eggs each morning and evening," said Fanny happily.

"Let's go out and see what the country round about is like," said Jo. "Can you spare us for an hour, Mother?"

"Yes, run along," said Mother. So off the three children went, out of the tiny white front gate and into the lane.

They explored all round about. They ran across a field where pink clover was full of bees. They paddled in a small brown stream that chattered away to itself under the willow trees in the sunshine.

And then they suddenly came to the wood. It was not far from their cottage, at the back. It looked quite an ordinary wood, except that the trees were a darker green than usual. A narrow

ditch separated the wood from the overgrown lane.

“A wood!” said Bessie, in delight. “We shall be able to have picnics here!”

“It’s rather a mysterious sort of wood,” said Jo thoughtfully. “Don’t you think so, Bessie?”

“Well, the trees are rather thick, but they seem about the same as any others,” said Bessie.

“They don’t quite,” said Fanny. “The noise the leaves make is different. Listen!”

They listened—and Fanny was right. The leaves of the trees in the wood did not rustle in quite the same way as other trees nearby did.

“It’s almost as if they were really talking to one another,” said Bessie. “Whispering secrets—real secrets, that we just can’t understand.”

“It’s a magic wood!” said Fanny suddenly.

Nobody said anything. They stood and listened. “Wisha-wisha-wisha-wisha-wisha!” said the trees in the wood, and bent towards one another in a friendly way.

“There might be fairy-folk in there,” said Bessie. “Shall we jump over the ditch and go in?”

“No,” said Jo. “We might get lost. Let’s find our way around before we go into big woods like this.”

“Jo! Bessie! Fanny!” suddenly came their mother’s voice from the cottage not far off. “Tea-time, tea-time!”

The children felt hungry all at once. They forgot the queer wood and ran back to their new home. Mother had new bread with strawberry jam for

them, and they ate a whole loaf between them.

Father came in as they were finishing. He had been shopping for Mother in the village three miles away and he was hungry and tired.

"We've been exploring everywhere, Father," said Bessie, pouring him out a big cup of tea.

"We've found a lovely wood," said Fanny.

"It's a queer sort of wood," said Jo. "The trees really seem to be talking to one another, Father."

"That must be the wood I've heard about this afternoon," said Father. "It has a strange name, children."

"What is it called?" asked Jo.

"It's called the Enchanted Wood," said their father. "People don't go there if they can help it. It's funny to hear things like this nowadays, and I don't expect there is really anything very queer about the wood. But just be careful not to go too far into it, in case you get lost."

The children looked in excitement at one another. The Enchanted Wood! What a lovely name!

And each child secretly thought the same thought—"I shall go and explore the Enchanted Wood as soon as ever I can!"

Their father set them to work in the overgrown garden after tea. Jo had to pull up the tough thistles and the two girls had to weed the untidy vegetable bed. They spoke to one another in joyful voices.

"The Enchanted Wood! We knew there was something queer about it!"

"I guessed there were fairies there!" said Fanny.

"We'll do some more exploring as soon as we can!" cried Bessie. "We'll find out what those whispering trees are saying! We'll know all the secrets of the wood before many weeks are past!"

And that night, at bedtime, all three stood at the window, looking out on the dark, whispering wood behind the cottage. What would they find in the Enchanted Wood?

II

FIRST VISIT TO THE WOOD

The three children had no chance to visit the Enchanted Wood until the next week, because they had to help their mother and father all they could. There was the garden to get tidy, curtains to sew for the house, and a great deal of cleaning to be done.

Sometimes Jo was free and could have gone by himself. Sometimes the girls were sent out for a walk, but Jo was busy. None of them wanted to go without the others, so they had to wait. And then at last their chance came.

"You can take your tea out to-day," said Mother. "You've worked well, all of you, and you deserve a picnic. I'll cut you some sandwiches, and you can take a bottle of milk."

"We'll go to the Wood!" whispered Bessie to the others, and with excited faces and beating hearts they helped their mother to pack their tea into a big basket.

They set off. There was a small gate at the bottom of their back garden that led into the overgrown lane running by the wood. They unlatched the gate and stood in the lane. They could see the trees in the wood, and hear them talking their strange tree-talk: "Wishā-wisha-wisha-wisha!"

"I feel as if there are adventures about," said Jo. "Come on! Over the ditch we go—and into the Enchanted Wood!"

One by one the children jumped over the narrow ditch. They stood beneath the trees and peered about. Small freckles of sunshine lay here and there on the ground, but not very many, for the trees were so thick. It was dim and green there, and a small bird nearby sang a queer little song over and over again.

"It really *is* magic!" said Fanny suddenly. "I can feel magic about somewhere, can't you, Bessie? Can't you, Jo?"

"Yes," said the others, and their eyes shone with excitement. "Come on!"

They went down a little green path that looked as if it had been made for rabbits, it was so small and narrow.

"Don't let's go too far," said Jo. "We had better wait till we know the paths a bit better before we go deep into the wood. Look about for

a good place to sit down and have our sandwiches, girls."

"I can see some wild strawberries!" cried Bessie, and she knelt down and pressed back some pretty leaves, showing the others deep red strawberries below.

"Let's pick some and have them for tea too," said Fanny. So they picked hard, and soon had enough to make a fine meal.

"Let's sit down under that old oak tree over there," said Jo. "It's all soft moss beneath. It will be like sitting on a green velvet cushion."

So they sat down, and undid their sandwiches. Soon they were munching away happily, listening to the dark green leaves overhead saying "Wisha-wisha" all the time.



And it was whilst they were in the middle of their tea that they saw a very peculiar thing. Fanny noticed it first.

Not far off was a clear piece of soft grass. As Fanny looked at it she noticed bumps appearing on it. She stared in surprise. The bumps grew. The earth rose up and broke in about six places.

"Look!" said Fanny, in a low voice, pointing to the piece of grass. "What's happening over there?"

All three watched in silence. And then they saw what it was. Six big toadstools were growing quickly up from the ground, pushing their way through, and rising up steadily!

"I've never seen *that* happen before!" said Jo, in astonishment.

"Sh!" said Bessie. "Don't make a noise. I can hear footsteps."

The others listened. Sure enough they heard the sound of pattering feet and little high voices.

"Let's get quickly behind a bush," said Bessie suddenly. "Whoever it is that is coming will be frightened if they see us. There's magic happening here, and we want to see it!"

They scrambled up and crept quietly behind a thick bush, taking their basket with them. They hid just in time, for even as Bessie settled down and parted the leaves of the bush to peep through, there came a troop of small men with long beards almost reaching the ground!

"Brownies!" whispered Jo.

The brownies went to the toadstools and sat down on them. They were holding a meeting. One

of them had a bag with him which he put down behind his toadstool. The children could not hear what was being said, but they heard the sound of the chattering voices, and caught one or two words.

Suddenly Jo nudged Bessie and Fanny. He had seen something else. The girls saw it too. An ugly, gnome-like fellow was creeping up silently behind the meeting on the toadstools. None of the brownies saw him or heard him.

"He's after that bag!" whispered Jo. And so he was! He reached out a long arm. His bony fingers closed on the bag. He began to draw it away under a bush.

Jo jumped up. He was not going to watch people being robbed without saying something! He shouted loudly:

"Stop thief! Hi, look at that gnome behind you!"

In a fright the brownies all leapt up. The gnome jumped to his feet and sped off with the bag. The brownies stared after him in dismay, not one of them following him. The robber ran towards the children's bush. He didn't know they were there.

As quick as lightning Jo put out his foot and tripped up the running gnome. Down he went, crash! The bag flew from his hand and Bessie picked it up and threw it to the astonished brownies, who were still standing by the toadstools. Jo tried to grab the gnome—but he was up and off like a bird.

The children tore after him. In between the